



The President's Daily Brief

7 May 1970

48

~~Top Secret~~

50X1

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

THE PRESIDENT'S DAILY BRIEF

7 May 1970

PRINCIPAL DEVELOPMENTS

Allied military operations have forced COSVN to curtail sharply its radio communications. (Page 1)

For their part, Cambodian troops reportedly took heavy losses yesterday when they tried to push Communist forces from the west bank of the Mekong near the Neak Luong ferry. (Page 3)

The Communists' promise to return to the Paris talks next week, after boycotting them yesterday, is one more sign that they are treading warily in these times of uncertainty in Indochina. (Page 4)

Recent satellite photography shows that the Soviets are continuing work on the J-Bird, their largest space booster. (Page 5)

50X1

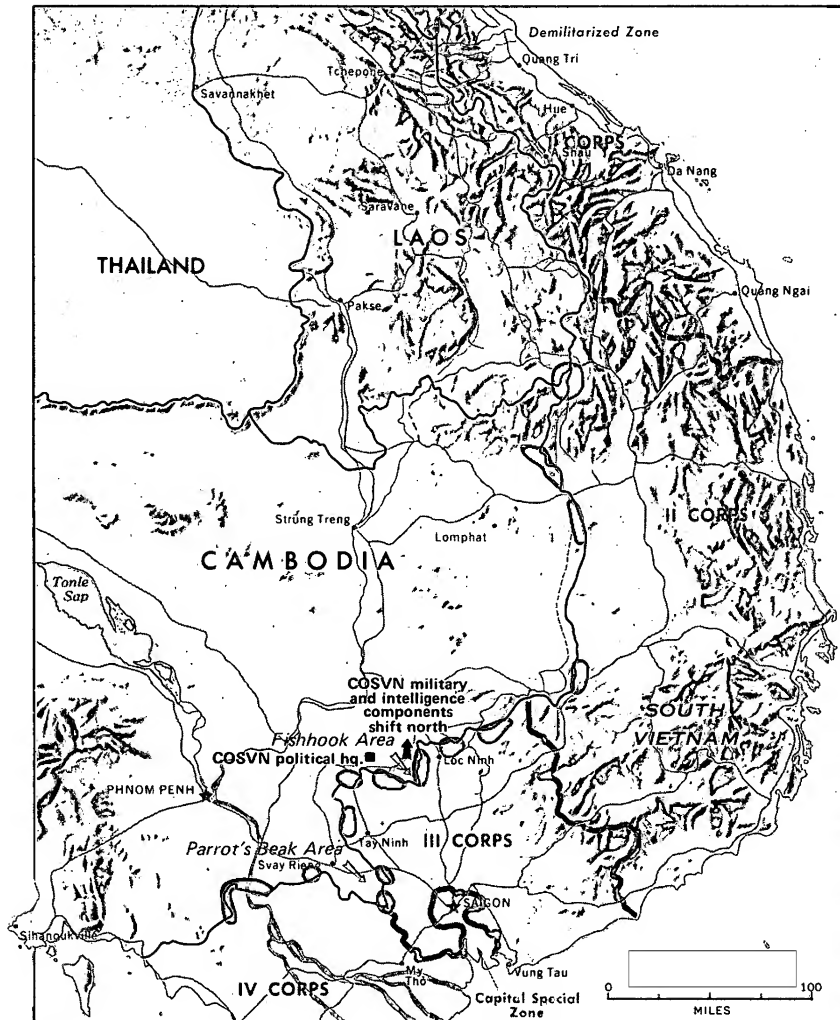
Soviet officials, meanwhile, are putting out further signals of impending high-level personnel changes. (Page 7)

France's annual nuclear test series will begin about the middle of the month in the Pacific. (Page 8)

Some of the political problems besetting the Saigon regime are outlined in an Annex today.

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

COSVN Staff Moving to Avoid Allied Operations



98447 5-70 CIA

VC/NVA base area along Cambodian border

50X1

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SOUTH VIETNAM - CAMBODIA

The top military and intelligence components of COSVN have shifted about ten miles to the north in the Fishhook sector and have cut back communications, limiting them mainly to the hours of darkness. The only exception has been the COSVN element that controls the various subregional headquarters in South Vietnam's III Corps. This station appears to be resuming some of its normal activity. Communications between the COSVN's military command and its political headquarters, which has been moving to evade allied actions in the area west of Mimot, also appear to have been affected.

These communication anomalies resemble those occurring during earlier allied attacks on Communist headquarters areas in South Vietnam. In these earlier operations, enemy communications were curtailed as long as allied forces were nearby, but they usually returned to normal when allied forces moved away. Headquarters staffs managed to survive, apparently because of their compactness and mobility in terrain that provides ready concealment.

Elements of only one North Vietnamese combat regiment have been contacted in the Fishhook region so far, but intercepted messages reveal that COSVN has ordered another regiment to attack allied forces in the area soon. Early reports on the other operations along the Cambodian border indicate that some allied units have come under heavy enemy fire, but no sustained ground battles have developed.

* * *

The Thieu government fears that Viet Cong agents may be able to foment major disorders in Saigon during the next few weeks, in coordination with increased military activity in the countryside.

The subject was discussed at an emergency cabinet meeting on 4 May [redacted] Security officials warned that many Communist agents have infiltrated Saigon and are attempting to inspire disorders which would peak on or about 19 May. Buddha's birthday will be celebrated this year on that date, which also happens to be Ho Chi Minh's birthday.

50X1
50X1

(continued)

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

Adding [] concern is the diversion for the Cambodian operations of many units which normally operate in the Saigon area. [] that the police are not taking their usual precautions because of poor morale. The police have been reported to be discouraged by the government's failure to back them up in their handling of student and veteran demonstrators.

50X1

50X1

The government is taking some steps to remedy the situation. Four battalions have been moved into the capital and the curfew has been extended. The government has also followed up its order closing all schools and universities in the Saigon area by banning all strikes, demonstrations, and meetings prejudicial to public security and order.

* * *

At Annex we discuss some of the other political problems currently besetting Thieu.

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

CAMBODIA

[redacted] several army battalions made an unsuccessful effort yesterday to push Communist forces from the west bank of the Mekong River near the Neak Luong ferry, south of Phnom Penh. Cambodian troops reportedly took heavy losses. No other significant engagements or Communist attacks were reported elsewhere in the country.

50X1

The government's evident determination to have a military showdown with the Communists is illustrated by its apparent intention to break diplomatic relations with the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government and resume closer relations with Saigon. These decisions may be announced today.

50X1

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

VIETNAM

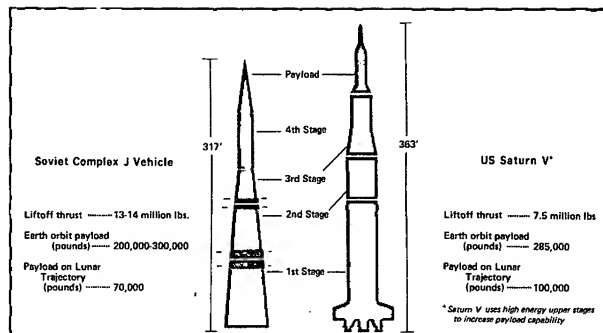
More significant than the Communists' refusal to show at yesterday's session of the Paris talks was their announcement that they would be back next week. The failure to break off the talks definitively, after months of threatening to do so, is the best example to date of Hanoi's unwillingness to close off any political options. The propaganda treatment of recent US military actions--condemning them in strong terms but carefully not committing Hanoi to forceful retaliation--is also illustrative of the recent caution of the North Vietnamese.

Hanoi's slowness in recognizing Sihanouk's "government-in-exile" may have been caused by the same urge to temporize. It extended recognition yesterday only after Peking, Budapest, Pyongyang, and Tirana had already done so. Moreover, the North Vietnamese did not say initially, as the Chinese had, that they were pulling their remaining diplomats out of Phnom Penh. This suggests that even now the Vietnamese Communists are reluctant to foreclose completely the possibility of dealing with the Lon Nol government.

One of the reasons for Hanoi's caution may be its inability to get Moscow and Peking to agree on a common line. Party First Secretary Le Duan has been away from home almost three weeks. His absence at such a critical time strongly suggests that the Vietnamese are being pulled in different directions by their two principal allies, with Peking pressing a militant line and Moscow advising moderation.

Such problems may delay long-range decisions involving the commitment of political and military assets in Indochina. They should not, however, get in the way of Hanoi's day-to-day tactical decisions on the battlefield.

Soviets Continue Work on Complex J Vehicle



50X1

50X1

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

USSR

The latest photography from a satellite over Tyuratam shows that the Soviets are still working on their largest space booster--assembled on one of the pads at Complex J and therefore dubbed "the J-Bird" by US observers of Soviet rocketry. The first booster of this type to be tested blew up on the other pad at Complex J last July during an attempt to launch a payload to the moon. The extensive damage to that pad is still being repaired.

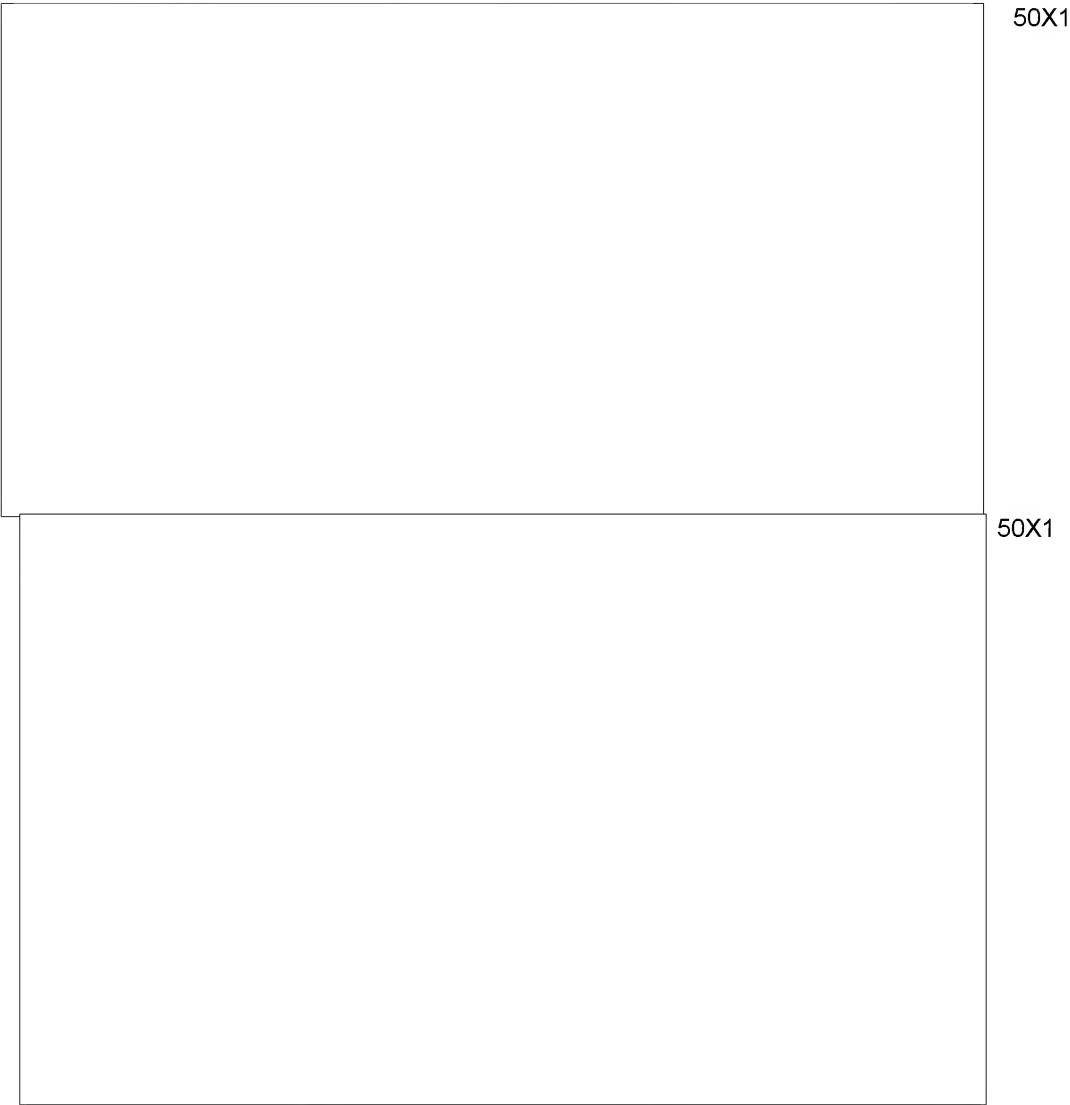
The J-Bird is the Soviet counterpart of the Saturn V, but

it cannot deliver as large a payload to the moon. The difference in performance is in the high-energy propellants in the upper stages of the Saturn.

50X1

The Soviets would have to use two J-Birds to put a man on the moon--a rendezvous would be necessary. Thus, both launch pads at Complex J would be needed. Interplanetary probes and circumlunar missions can be handled by one J-Bird, which could also be used to orbit a permanent space station weighing 100 to 150 tons. An unmanned lunar landing and return mission could also be launched.

Because of the problems the Soviets have been having with their large space boosters, the intelligence community has estimated that they probably will not be able to make a lunar landing before 1973.



FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

USSR



50X1



50X1



50X1



50X1



50X1



50X1

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

USSR

Recent comments of two Soviet officials posted abroad to a US official tend to add weight to other reports we have had of impending changes in the Soviet leadership. A. A. Agronov, an adviser to the Soviet SALT delegation, on 16 April volunteered that Premier Kosygin will probably soon go into honorable retirement. General Major Stolnik, Soviet military attaché in Washington, responding to a query on the reported illnesses of several Soviet leaders, said that Kosygin, President Podgorny, and Politburo member Suslov are all in poor health. He added that their advanced ages (66, 67, and 67 respectively) make it difficult for the three to execute their responsibilities. Consequently he believes that they are likely to be replaced by younger men in the near future.

It is unlikely that two such responsible Soviet officials would speak in this way without instructions. It would seem that the USSR is preparing foreign opinion for some high-level resignations and wishes them to appear as normal retirements. The interesting thing will be who moves up.

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

NOTES

USSR - Communist China: The Soviet leadership was clearly rankled by Peking's stinging attack last month marking the Lenin centennial and accusing Brezhnev of betraying Leninism.

50X1

50X1

The Soviets have recently stepped up their personal criticism of Mao including his family life.

50X1

France: This year's nuclear test series is slated to begin on 15 May at the Pacific test center near Tahiti. The program will extend into August

50X1

USSR-Czechoslovakia: The most interesting feature of the friendship treaty signed yesterday is the assumption by the signatories of mutual defense obligations not confined to Europe. The Warsaw Pact treaty and earlier Soviet bilateral treaties with East European allies explicitly limit defense obligations to Europe. East Europeans anxious to stay out of a Sino-Soviet war will read this provision as confirmation of their worst fears.

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SAIGON UNREST BECOMING CRITICAL

The Thieu government has become overloaded with problems of political discontent and is finding itself unable to deal effectively with all of them at once. During recent months the regime has tried a combination of firmness and conciliation as it has dealt with each protesting group in turn. No sooner has the government at least temporarily alleviated one source of unrest, however, than it has been confronted by another.

These troubles began late last October, when new austerity taxes were announced, immediately sparking higher prices. Salaried people, including the military and government officials, Thieu's two most important constituencies, were particularly hard hit. Deep and widespread antigovernment resentment developed. A variety of interest groups in Saigon, sensing that the government was on the defensive, began agitating against the government in subsequent weeks.

President Thieu has tried to be flexible in handling dissenters. To some, in particular the ethnic Cambodians and veterans, government policy has been relatively conciliatory--and to some degree the pressures generated by these groups were relieved at least temporarily. But as Thieu dealt lightly with some he was coming down hard on others. Government handling of the Chau trial intimidated the opposition during much of the winter. Moreover, student prisoners were reportedly tortured and particular issues of newspapers were seized wholesale.

In any event, neither tough nor soft policies seemed to work; the number of opposition groups grew and as they grew gained confidence. The feeling is now abroad that the government is on the defensive and critics can safely get away with actions which once would have been dangerous.

In this atmosphere previously taboo subjects have been raised to embarrass the government. Thus, although many South Vietnamese generals have been notoriously corrupt for years, a Senator has just come forward to make public charges of corruption against III Corps Commander Tri, and President Thieu's intelligence adviser, General Quang. The potential for serious political scarring is almost unlimited, since corruption is widespread and it will be extremely difficult for Thieu to weed out all the targets for scandal when he must have the support of

A-1

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

the general officer corps to remain in office. All that is required to keep the pressure on the government is for the Senator and other enemies of corruption or enemies of the regime to have enough courage to make the charges. In the past, such courage has been rare, but more such charges may be made if the government remains on the defensive.

Meanwhile, militant Buddhists with long memories of earlier struggles against some of the present military men in the regime, have begun to take off the wraps. Activists from the An Quang faction have forced an armed clash with a rival, government-backed Buddhist sect and reportedly with some government forces. If this clash has produced some new An Quang martyrs, as some reports claim, and further clashes develop between the militant Buddhists and government forces, it is possible that significant military strength might have to be diverted from the war for domestic purposes. This happened during the so-called Buddhist Struggle Movement in 1966.

While the Saigon leadership tries to keep the lid on domestic discontent, tries to make Vietnamization work, and tries to adjust to the developing situation in Cambodia, it has suddenly been confronted with an unfavorable decision from the Supreme Court. The court has declared the politically-sensitive conviction of Deputy Tran Ngoc Chau to be unconstitutional and the economically important austerity taxes to be invalid.

There have been a variety of indications that those at the center of power in Saigon are becoming progressively more discouraged over the regime's inability to deal effectively with the many problems confronting it. Both President Thieu and Prime Minister Khiem have on occasion hinted that they might leave office sooner than they had once expected. There appears to be some loss of mutual confidence between Thieu and some of his key lieutenants, as well as a tendency toward greater secretiveness within the inner circles of government, suggesting that some important officials are becoming less sure of themselves and where they stand.

Alarmed by accumulating pressures, President Thieu held the special cabinet meeting [redacted] and ordered a crackdown, particularly against dissident students. A crackdown will probably not help the government deal more effectively

50X1
50X1

A-2

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

with its difficult economic problems, particularly the rising cost of living. Nor will it gain the respect of the many cliques in Saigon who see the regime primarily as an obstacle to a share of power at the center. The government, however, will probably be tempted to resort to increasingly repressive measures to suppress the rising tide of criticism, thereby hoping to reduce the developing air of crisis, at least for the time being.

A-3

FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

Top Secret